

Key Information

Name: Roger Edwards

Age: 73

Current Cabin: 46

Date of Interview: October 11, 2014

Interviewer: Elena Becker (University of Puget Sound)

Ethnographic Preface

I met Roger at his cabin on Salmon Beach in order to conduct the interview. It had been drizzling, so the stairs were wet, but it stayed sunny throughout the interview. The cabin is surrounded by sculpture, and the décor demonstrates the inhabitants' commitment to Salmon Beach - a framed photo of a cabin here, a hand drawn poster advertising the rowboat races there. Roger is the self-appointed historian of Salmon Beach, so much of what he speaks about during this interview are the stories of other people *he* has interviewed, and the Beach's evolution even before he moved in. The interview is divided into two portions because I had already stopped the recorder when Roger remembered he had one last story to tell me - how Salmon Beach got its name.

Transcription:

[EB] So, why don't we start out with you telling me about how you guys came to Salmon Beach. How did you find out about it, why did you move down here?

[RE] Well, all right, so Salmon Beach. On I think a Saturday, July 1962 I think it was on a harbor tour and so I was interested in the place so I decided to drive out in this neighborhood and try to figure out how to get here and I got down to the bottom of the hill and found two houses for sale. Well, being twenty one years old and having, you know, a modest savings account I thought "hmmm... what about the prices?" Well, one was for sale for twelve hundred dollars and one was for sale for twelve hundred dollars three doors away, but it was furnished! So I says, "Roger! What a bargain! I'll take the furnished one." So, on Monday I owned a house at Salmon Beach. Number 39. And, not knowing exactly what I'd bought, but I was feeling pretty good about it, so I called my mother.

Now, keep in mind, the perceptions of a twenty one year old are a little different than the mother of a twenty one year old. My mother, who happened to be fortunate, graduated from Mills College in the mid-thirties and unfortunately, her first husband, who was my father died in World War II so she was stuck with a one and a half year old little boy. And uh, she was kinda shocked needless to say, most widows are. And I was oblivious to the whole thing, needless to say when you're one and a half you don't have a whole lot of memories of anything hardly. At any rate, my mother's reaction being a former Job's daughter's queen and graduate from Mills college which is probably the finest girl's school on the

West Coast - she was horrified. She said "Roger I'm ashamed of you. Throwing your money away! Twelve hundred dollars? It must be a shack!" And I said "Gee mom, that's what they call them is fishing shacks!" But I thought the price was right. She was speechless, she could not believe that her son would do a stupid thing like that. So that's how I basically was introduced to Salmon Beach. Basically I thought it was a great bargain and my mother was very disappointed in me. So, there you go... and things progressed from there and I'm sure there were a lot of people down here who had a different experience...

First of all, you have to understand, you have to have the twelve hundred dollars - it's not your life's savings, but you don't have a mortgage. Nowadays, trying to get a loan down here... trying to get a loan down here then was impossible, 'cause this was redlined. Now, that's a term that they don't use much anymore, but it wasn't until the late seventies or even the eighties before people were even able to think about a loan down here. And nowadays you know, it's still pretty dicey - you might get turned down three or four times, but at that time in 1962 I was very fortunate to be able to afford to literally gamble twelve hundred dollars on a shack. And... my next door neighbor Richard Hadden Harkness he had bought his house for \$350, his little cabin and Richard Hadden Harkness, he was a little older than I was and he had been voted "most likely to succeed" in his 1940 Muskegon High school class - he was my next door neighbor. Unfortunately he went off to World War II and became sort of a veteran with a lot of problems, and instead of becoming the son of a wealthy pipe manufacturer in Michigan he wound up being a brush picker in Allyn. You know where Allyn is?

[EB] I do - my family has some connections out in Belfair.

[RE] Oh. So at any rate he got married and lost his children because he couldn't support them and uh I had to loan him a white shirt to go to court

[EB] So he was your next door neighbor when you were in cabin 39. He was 38, you were 39?

[RE] I was in 39 and he was in 38, yeah. But at any rate, here are these two essentially, y'know, sort of from different generations and different circumstances next door to each other. And that was my... essentially I didn't know anyone down here and he was sort of an alcoholic and then he didn't have a job so... the people that were living in this house [46], they had a paper route. So I said, "Richard, how would you like to deliver the newspaper? Then you can find out where all the parties are!" He loved the idea! So I arranged that my next door neighbor could basically deliver the newspapers on Salmon Beach in 1965 and that way he became literally the walking, talking Salmon Beach grapevine. It was great, 'cause I was at that time I was working. I was one of the few people that actually had a job, but he was the paper boy thanks to the fact that...

He couldn't afford the bond so I had to basically put it in my name, but he would deliver the papers. And Richard Hadden Harkness and Roger Cushman Edwards, they were next door neighbors. Both from fairly wealthy families... mine and his and when he was invited back to his twenty-fifth high school reunion... that would be 1965 right?

[EB] Right.

[RE] So he got back there, his father had died and his mother basically forced him to go down, she says "You go down to the store and get some decent clothes, you're not coming back to this house." So he went down and charged some clothes to his mother, showed up for the high school reunion I guess. And came back, and that's the last that he ever went back to Michigan cause he died about five years later.

[EB] Now how did you move from being neighbors with him in 39 down here to 46?

[RE] Oh, okay. Well, that's what happens, life is just kind of a series of, y'know, revolving... kinda like a merry-go-round. I got interested in... and I... why did I move out of 39? That's a good question. First of all, we have to back up a little bit.

I had spent two years at Oregon State College, now it's Oregon State University, from '58 to '60. My mother, being a graduate of Mills, said "Roger, you've got to get your bachelor's degree. You *have* to go back to college." And I had a pretty good job, I was working as a draftsman detailer for J.D. English steel company on the tide flats. At my mother's insistence, and to make my grandfather happy too - I mean, he was still living - I enrolled in Oregon Technical Institute in Klamath Falls. Which is a... essentially like Bates Vocational School [Note: Now Bates Technical College, in Tacoma]. And therefore I basically got a degree in surveying technology and rented out number 39 to a couple of college students. They're a very interesting bunch!

John McKay his father was a dean of the theological school in Berkeley... what's the name of the place? It's very famous anyway, in Berkeley. And his son followed a rather, y'know, divergent route. This is the '60s, remember? Well, you don't remember though, that's the problem! Anyway, he went off to the school that would accept him, which turned out to be University of Puget Sound and he kind of drifted around from one college to the next, and the last I heard of him he was the golf pro to the King of Botswana. After nine years of college he got a degree in agronomy! And taught the king how to play golf. I tell you, there is such a diversity of people down here who have been here for... not nearly as long as I have, but people who have spent some time on Salmon Beach wind up with amazing careers, or not careers, some are just more interested in whatever life happens to bring, but at any rate, I was trying to remember exactly why...

39. Why did I leave 39? I'm not really sure. But I know that I bought number 63.

[EB] Okay, and at this point you still own 39.

[RE] I still own 39. But I bought number 63, and I bought number 63 because I wanted to get rid of the no-good owners who basically didn't deserve the place. I think I paid a couple thousand for it, just to get rid of Joe and Eloise Buchanan. That's on tape I hope! At any rate, so in the meantime, uh, my cousin Marilyn -- at that time Barnard -- was interested in Salmon Beach and this is in the latter part of the sixties. She says, "we'd like to own a place at the beach too." Now this particular place was owned by

the Jordan family, and that was another sad, sad case. There were two boys and two girls and they lived mostly upstairs which was not heated. It's sorta like upstairs was a dormitory for impoverished kids.

[EB] And so this is the family that bought...

[RE] This is the family that Marilyn bought this house [i.e. 46] from. The Jordans. Clarence and Mabel Jordan. Their house had burned down in Cle Elum, so they moved to Salmon Beach cause that was all they could afford. And their son, Larry Jordan he was a pretty enterprising kid and he actually salvaged the dance floor from the Showboat Tavern, and that's what you're looking at right there [gestures to floor of living room]. That's a dance floor!

[EB] Wow! That's great.

[RE] Yeah! I mean, going around salvaging materials you know, it goes all the way across the room, except Marilyn wants the carpet. But we left this part of the dance floor open, anyways. So Larry Jordan is another example of poverty in action. But in any rate, he got tangled up with what's known as a grass widow. Now that's a term that maybe you're not familiar with, and in fact I don't know how it got started. Apparently a grass widow is somebody who's had supposedly a marriage and supposedly a divorce, but they're just sort of... loose. So he got tangled up with a grass widow. Some of these terms... they're really sort of antique terms and I don't really understand where they come from. At any rate.

So Larry Jordan's parents, Clarence and Mabel decided in about 1967 to sell this place and since Marilyn was interested in living down here in one of these shacks I said "look, I tell you what. I'll offer you a thousand dollars for it." I told Marilyn that it's for her, I mean but cause he wanted to buy a self-contained trailer y'know with the proceeds from the sale. Well, I took it to director of the homeowners group and found out that they were behind on their property taxes, so we settled on about nine hundred and something. So we got this place for about nine hundred.

[EB] So at this point you own 39, 63 and you've just purchased 46?

[RE] Yeah. Well, after purchasing this place, since Marilyn and her husband lived in Auburn, I decided it would be more economical to move from 63 into this place, as kind of like a tenant. I mean, I pay all the bills so...

[EB] So your cousin Marilyn still owns this place?

[RE] Well now it's entirely different. Now she got a divorce from her husband and she and I made out a new whattaya call it - title to it so that we're both co-owners. Okay, so that's how I wound up going from 39 to 63 to 46. And then of course I had to move this piano from 39 to 63 to 46.

[EB] How do you do that?

[RE] Well I'm glad you asked that question, because it's pretty clever. What you do is, you build a sled, and you build one runner higher than the other so it's almost leaning - it's not vertical. You use a full size two by four, the old fashioned kind that's really two by four and on the other side you use one of these modern, manufactured two by fours so you've got an extra half an inch, so it tilts. Well the reason for that is, you don't want to take a chance of it falling either one way or the other. You want it basically leaning so that one person keeps it from falling in the direction it's tilted to, and then two people push it and two people pull it. So it's a five person operation. But a lot of people don't understand that, and in fact if you look real closely you'll see a piano frame hanging on the back wall that didn't survive a move. It sank.

Pianos were quite popular at one time, everybody wanted a piano, and so even in the 30s and the 4s you could get an old piano that was probably way out of tune, but people would haul it down to the beach some way or another, then to move it from one house to another people would attempt to move it by boat. Big mistake! Boats have a history of overturning. And in fact, I can tell you, I remember moving up a stove, beautiful - one of these antique cooking stoves. A Weber. And we brought it in by a boat that was called the African Queen, a fairly good sized boat, but we couldn't bring the African Queen onto the beach, so we brought a rowboat alongside. And we tied the two together. Then we had about four or five people, very carefully, lowering the piano [note: stove] into the rowboat. No problem. Until everybody moved back from the rail. And remember, the rowboat is tied to the African Queen. So what happens when the African Queen just goes this way and pulls the rowboat up? [Indicates tipping with his hand]. So it's down there, out in the water, in front of 21 and we call it a home for octopus. Kind of expensive, cause I think I paid around seven or eight hundred dollars for this antique stove, and this was in the seventies, but at any rate.

There's been a number of miscalculations in moving things from one place to another. So anyway, we got the piano from 39 to 46 and stuff from 63 to here and the big event of the season was, the upstairs, like I say, was pretty much a dormitory for poor kids, but we basically made a bedroom out of it and the big event was taking the window out around the first of May, and left the window out all summer long until the first of October when we put the window back in. So that's the highlight of the summer season, sleeping upstairs.

And we're getting kinda close to the place where I actually became seriously interested in history. Oh, I know what started it! Excuse me. This is a little out of sequence, but,

At the time that I bought number 63 I found on the top shelf in the closet a 1948 telephone directory. Wow! 1948! Hell, I was only 8 years old then. So, in the early 70s about 1971 that's when I used this 1948 telephone book in my very first attempt to document the history of Salmon Beach. And I went all the way through the phone book and wrote down everybody's name who had a phone at that time. Tracking down people was my, kind of like kept me busy, and out of trouble. That's debatable! But anyway, from 1970 or 71 until about 1977 when Marilyn moved in with me, when she divorced John and... anyway, that's when I did most of my work on researching the history of the people who have lived here in the past. And basically, I find that the most satisfying thing that I've done... pretty satisfying.

When you're single and you don't want to get involved in romantic entanglements and you just want to do something that nobody else is doing, you study history and you have to do it by finding people that actually lived it. Okay? So.

[EB] Now, throughout that, have you noticed that there have been shifts in the culture of Salmon Beach? Now, I would imagine that the 40s were very different from the 60s were very different from the 80s were very different from today?

[RE] Yeah, there certainly has been. And that's how I kinda organized things. And basically there's several very distinct changes. Prior to WWI this was essentially heaven for family camping.

[EB] So undeveloped.

[RE] Yeah, still undeveloped. There weren't even house numbers. Can you imagine a community with no house numbers? Really, seriously, there was no reason to have house numbers because there was no such thing as a lot and all you needed was a name. "Where do you live?" "Oh, Sunset Inn" or whatever. There's a whole series of names down here for these camps and that defined whose cabin it was "Oh, I have camp such and such or Beachnest or"

[EB] And when people say camp they're referring to the cabin?

[RE] Yeah. Well, they started out originally as nothing more than platforms. And you'd get a surplus tent or something and you'd put your tent up on a platform for the summer and then you'd come back maybe next year and hopefully maybe there's something left.

Our worst slides were in January of 1919. And we lost 14 cabins at that time. I talked to people who actually lived it. Took a lot of effort to find them, but defining time periods are: Prior to WWI, then after WWI there was a housing shortage, so they were pretty full. Then, after WWI though the United States was not in the war that long, cause Europe was kind of battling it out 1914 - 1916/17, then the US finally came in, here comes the Yanks and all that business. Well, a little bit late, but we finished the job.

Then, after WWI came Prohibition. Can you imagine it illegal?? Illegal? To go down to the saloon and get drunk? It must be those damn women! Women's Christian Temperance Union, it's all their fault. So anyway, this created an unstoppable demand for places to make moonshine, and what better place than Salmon Beach? Oh, gosh we had springs in the back of our house that provided all the water you needed and we had a store down here that was selling sugar by the ten pound bags and the owner was so dumb he didn't even know what they were using it for. Poor guy.

And I actually talked to the store owner's family and they were very very religious. And the Church of the Brethren. Any rate, he was working double shifts at the smelter, saved up enough money to buy the store and started selling sugar like crazy.

Anyways, during Prohibition this place got a reputation as a bunch of alcoholics, moonshiners and there wasn't a family left. Maybe 1 or 2. But the family camping era ended, the moonshine era lasted 1919/20 to 1933. Then, two things happened: prohibition ended and electricity came!

Some of the guys up at the WPA camp, which is still there, it's now a dog park, decided "Hey, let's run some poles down to Salmon Beach" - after work, you know. It wasn't part of the WPA project, oh no. This was a moonlight job. So they started putting in poles, and all of a sudden - electric lights! Oh! Wow! Can you imagine carrying around kerosene lanterns all day. 1934. From '34 to '49 this was paradise for young families who basically are not well off, but willing to try to raise a family. And you had a lot of kids who basically ran the gamut from totally out of control to really nice kids.

And the funniest story, this is written down, there were these three boys, the Kirkevold kids next door to the Whites, this is Claude and Sylvia White, who had three daughters. Three boys, three daughters. And what was the most fun? When the tide was out, they'd sneak under their house and watch them pee! Cause there was no sewer down here. So the girls entertained the boys without really knowing it. But unfortunately, what apparently happened was Evie (her real name is Valdeen) happened to either poop or pee on one of the Kirkevold boys and he went up and dragged her out of the outhouse and threw her in the bay. He was mad. I mean, it wasn't her fault! At any rate, this is the sort of things that young kids do, when there's a community of people who basically don't have a whole lot of entertainment opportunities. You can't afford a lot of things -- one person got a broken teacup for Christmas - but there was a lot of people who actually, the children pretty much survived, it's another funny story...

[He tells the story of Sally Sue Pfitzenmeyer, whose father almost died on a clamming trip when his rowboat overturned in front of her house. This spooked her so badly that she moved out of Salmon Beach upon graduating from high school.]

But she actually came down here to visit, you know

[EB] What did she think?

[RE] Oh, she was fascinated, how the place has changed. Really, it's just that she had a bad experience with her father almost drowning.

[Explains some of his historical techniques, and what it's like to research communities. Says he went to Fairbanks, AK to meet a woman who got a scholarship to Stanford, but her high school counselor told her to forget going to Stanford because she was from Salmon Beach. She ended up at the University of Washington. He speaks at length about her experience in Fairbanks.]

[EB] So now, during your time here, do you think that the same kind of turnover has continued? Do you see a lot of people live here for a little while and then move to Alaska or... I don't know, Montana?

[RE] Yeah, they're entranced to start with and then they find out that there's more in the world than basically hiding out at Salmon Beach. Like I say, the golf pro for the kind of Botswana... They run the gamut. Yeah, most of 'em move on, actually.

[EB] So what's been different for you?

[RE] Me? Well, I'm comfortable because I had a job in the highway department that basically is an 8 to 5 type job that doesn't require a whole lot of moving anywhere. You know, local job. And I had the free time, opportunity, between 1970/71 and 1977 when I could basically spend hours at the library looking through old city directories or telephone books, finding people. Really, I considered it fun. The library even loaned me a city directory that I could take home, and I could look through it from 10 until 2 in the morning and it would go a lot faster. So I've got about, basically, besides the telephone book of 48 I've got my list of everybody who lived here until they stopped putting people in the city directory from Salmon Beach because there was an earthquake in 1949 and the whole community essentially was evicted, at the landowner's insistence.

From 1949 on you had a whole bunch of speculators buying these houses that were basically on the market for whatever they could get to pay their bar bill. There were a lot of people who ran up bar bills at the Big Bad Wolf or... there was the Big Bad Wolf, the Three Little Pigs, the Idle Hour, the Goldfish and the Showboat.

[EB] So now, tell me, when you moved in in the early 60s, how was the era of the sixties different from what we've been talking about with the early 40s?

[RE] Well, the sixties it was basically frowned upon not because of prohibition or anything, not because of the moonshiners, because essentially. There was a lawsuit by the landowner to get rid of us. Landowner is John S. Baker and he tried to get rid of us. We were very lucky to have a lawyer, Robert Copeland, who was a labor lawyer and our president down here happened to be a battalion fire chief. And he basically worked pro bono, and he represented us, and we went all the way to the State Supreme Court. State of Washington. So we dragged out this lawsuit, and it kept us here until 1958. So in 1959 that was the very first time we were able to actually get a lease on the "tract" or whatever, that your cabin was sitting on, because during the period of the lawsuit they hadn't paid property taxes, because they figured well if they lose they lose. But because they had six years of back taxes to pay, and the fact that John S. Baker had died the heirs, they said "we don't care! As long as they will come up with the money to pay for the back taxes, why should we worry about what kind of people they are?" So we got leases for the first time in 1959, they were only for a couple of years, but everybody figured this won't go on forever and then they kept getting renewed every couple of years, cause it was really dependable income.

Now, who would you expect to live in a cabin where the lease might run out this year or maybe next year, but there was no guarantee and you sure couldn't get a loan, so... the hippies moved in! They were delighted! They didn't care, they'd fix up an old shack and figured "well, if we're here for a year or two that's great". So that's when people like Richard Turner and Jim Ehrler - he's probably the person who

best represents the era. Jim Ehrler, who's still living, he was a very creative kind of unusual person. He had a pet monkey! No kidding. The monkey would run around and swing from wire to wire, but he was living down in 51, not very far from here.

Then he basically talked me into financing a major project. He was gonna build a double house on lot 61 and 62 that were joined in the middle by a boat ramp. And he designed it and basically actually got into graduate school as an architect and became a very successful architect in Seattle. He also redesigned the Idle Hour tavern, so the entrance goes diagonal.

[Speaks about this, and Ehrler's architecture. Then discusses Ehrler's wife, Carol]

Anyway, he had designed these houses, and he got one freestanding wall up, two freestanding walls are held up by crosspieces, this way and that way [indicates an X] and a windstorm came up. And without realizing the problem, the wind would have the crosspieces not connected, they were just slapping together, and the one wall facing the south basically blew down and hit the wall on the north, which ruined the idea of building two houses together. So he eventually sold the lot on the south side to Bob Reinhardt and finished the house on the north side in a very creative design. And succeeded in law school, and eventually he... Carol and Jim divorced and I promised Carol -- because I think she was the one who picked up his debts or something, but she became a legal secretary and really bright -- but I promised Carol that I would haul her piano down to wherever she was.

[He tells about driving her piano down to San Francisco. It was perilous hauling a grand piano in a Volkswagen. He starts to tell about how Carol remarried and moved to New York.]

[EB] Now, Roger, is that a pretty common thing for neighbors to do, to help each other out like that? You mentioned that it took 5 people to move this [his] piano... do you just go down and knock on doors and round some folks up?

[RE] Well, if you knew what the problems were, yeah, you could find someone to help you move it, and there were other people down here besides my neighbor Richard Harkness who wasn't much help. He did find out all the parties though! But at any rate, there are people who... finding people can be the most interesting part of being a historian.

[Discusses this. Last summer, he visited Evie White in Oklahoma. Talks about her, and her various marriages. Mentions that he would like to track down more residents of Salmon Beach - especially Carol.]

[EB] Roger, tell me about... while I was waiting in the kitchen I noticed there's a poster that says "Rowboat Races" on it, and has a picture of a Salmon?

[RE] Yeah, that's Richard Turner. And his claim to fame is being the first Commodore of the Salmon Beach rowboat race. Which, at the time, in 1970, that was a good thing if you were kind of a crazy hippie to do, was to dress up like you were a commodore. I won the first award, for winning the first rowboat race, but then as time goes on, you now have canoes and kayaks and paddleboards, we have people who

just for the fun of it decide to put on a wetsuit and float the whole way. And he always gives a last place award.

All these people, you know, they have a certain claim to fame of some sort. Some people are like Sherry Konken, who, she decided to open a bakery. Sherry's bakery. And I thought that was a great idea, so I'd buy cookies from her and give them to new people down here. But, you could spend, like I say, I'm only telling you about the people who I'm still able to talk to. Now, there's people that I interviewed back in the 70s who are long since dead.

[He discusses an upcoming project he's given to a younger resident of Salmon Beach - to find Lisa Hobart, the daughter of a resident (Eva Maxine Hobart) of Salmon Beach.]

[Interview wraps up, RE agrees to be interviewed again by the project.]

Part 2:

[EB] Go ahead

[RE] How Salmon Beach got its name is the fact that we used to be simply the Tacoma Narrows, okay. And a very enterprising store owner decided to basically say "Let's call this Salmon Beach!" because Salmon Beach is just, I mean, will attract a whole bunch of fisherman and we can basically sell more things in the store. So, all of a sudden the name changes to Salmon Beach instead of Tacoma Narrows or just the Narrows and he later basically gets a better idea - "let's open a roller skating rink at Redondo!" and it was a huge success! Until it burned down in 1951. So, anyway, that's why... people with a bright idea, with initiative, can do amazing things.